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UNCLAS HALIFAX 000242

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CAN, EB
DHS FOR CBP

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: HALIFAX PRECLEARANCE: BANGOR WITHDRAWS OBJECTIONS

1. The City Council of Bangor, Maine, unanimously approved late October 25 a resolution to withdraw opposition to Halifax International Airport's (HIA) application for preclearance. The Council also authorized the City Manager and Airport Director to sign an agreement with HIA on joint marketing. These efforts will focus mainly on expanding regional air service and traffic, but will also include broader economic development and tourism marketing. In the end Bangor reportedly indicated that it had no concerns about originating preclearance, but insisted on an undertaking in writing from HIA that it would never seek in-transit preclearance. Betting that Bangor would ultimately withdraw its objections, Halifax recently committed itself to beginning an expansion project that will -- if preclearance is approved -- create a new dedicated area for U.S. DHS personnel. HIA anticipates that the earliest this C\$70 million facility facility could be ready would be late 2006; a spring 2007 opening date is more likely.

2. The Council's consensus decision came despite what we were told was a major last-ditch effort to derail it or delay it until after the November 2 election. Bangor's next step will be to communicate its action to Maine's Senators and Member of Congress. HIA anticipates hosting soon a meeting to get a joint marketing council up and running. Airport CEO Reg Milley plans to travel to Ottawa October 26 to brief Foreign Affairs and press for the inclusion of Halifax preclearance on the next Ridge-MacLellan meeting agenda.

3. COMMENT: Bangor's action comes after a major effort for close to two years on the part of HIA to address concerns over lost business if preclearance comes to pass. HIA had been prepared to offer to indemnify Bangor for lost revenue, but in the end the Council reportedly did not insist on it. The airport terminal expansion project, which will only be completed if preclearance is approved, could generate significant business opportunities for U.S. firms. A Trade Lead on the project has already been filed by FCS Halifax. END COMMENT.